NOVA SCOTIA

SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

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Nova Scotia
School Accreditation

Information for Participating Schools

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School Accreditation Lead Team

David White	Regional Education Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Education, Chair
Vince Warner	Director, Evaluation Services, Nova Scotia Department of Education
Lawrence Ryan	Co-ordinator, Leadership Development, Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
Mitch Landry	Consultant, Principal Leadership, Nova Scotia Department of Education
Margo Tait	Director, Programs and Services, Annapolis Valley School Board
Kevin Power	Consultant, Planning for Improvement, Halifax Regional School Board

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Board School Accreditation Co-ordinators

Ann Moore	South Shore Regional School Board
Normand Poirier	Conseil scolaire acadien provincial
Stephen Amirault	Tri-County Regional School Board
Barry MacLeod	Strait Regional School Board
David Brennick	Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board

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What Is a Successful School?

What is a successful school? There is no shortage of research in addressing this question. Much of what has been written about the characteristics of a successful school or an effective school is embodied in 40 years of research.

Effective school research was initiated in response to the major finding of the Coleman Report commissioned by the U.S Congress and published in 1966. The report concluded, after examining the achievement of 600 000 students in 4000 schools, that family background/social economic status was the single most important determinant of student achievement and that schools do not really make a difference.

Effective schools research, as a response to the Coleman Report, has shown that schools can and do make a difference. The weight of 40 years of intensive studies has demonstrated that schools exhibiting certain key characteristics can significantly improve student achievement. To this end, schools that have a clear sense of mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, and frequent monitoring of student progress; that provide opportunity to learn and time-on-task; that provide a safe, orderly environment; that have positive home–school communications, have a positive impact on student achievement. Schools with these characteristics do make a difference. They are successful schools.

These characteristics, or "correlates" as they are often called, serve as indicators and can be used as a framework to measure school success.

Ongoing measurement of school success is an important consideration in this age of increased accountability, expectations around improved student achievement, and improved schools. In 1966, Prof. Michael Barber stated, "a school that has the capacity to examine all that it does critically in the light of genuine evidence—including data on pupil performance—and sets targets for its own development will be an improving school." Therefore, what is needed is a systematic and reliable means of measuring ongoing school success.

Nova Scotia School Accreditation provides that means. Using a framework of 19 key questions, schools examine critically all that they do through the collection and analysis of data and then set goals for improvement.

Today, educational researchers such as Marzano, Lezotte, and others continue to support the findings of Barber as these relate to the school's role and capacity in creating success for all students.

Nova Scotia School Accreditation

Introduction

School accreditation is a program of continuous improvement. It is results based and data driven. School accreditation, as described in this document, is a program that has been defined and designed by Nova Scotia educators. Nova Scotia School Accreditation should not be confused with other accreditation programs, nor with improvement-planning and success-planning processes engaged in by other jurisdictions.

Nova Scotia School Accreditation is about schools telling their stories. It is about schools identifying their specific needs and attending to these as priorities. This unique accreditation program includes an internal review, a school improvement plan, and a plan for monitoring and reporting on growth.

Background

The desire to improve and then validate the quality of schools in Nova Scotia is not new. As early as the 19th century, with the establishment of public schools in the province, inspectors began a regular schedule of school visitations. These visits were conducted with the expressed purpose of assessing the quality of each school's program. In addition, a system of "normal schools" was created to address the quality of teaching. Normal schools, in effect, became teacher training institutions. All of these actions were undertaken to improve the quality of programs offered to students throughout the province.

School inspectors remained in an active role into the 1960s, but their responsibilities changed as school boards increased their supervisory roles. Inspectors continued to have the legal responsibility for what was taking place in provincial schools, but the operational responsibility had shifted to the administrators of each local school board. Inspection teams from the Department of Education worked in concert with school boards, and responded to their requests to visit schools in the board's jurisdiction and report on the quality of the education offered. Over the last 15 years, any reviews conducted to determine the quality of schools and school programs have been performed by school boards, and not the Department of Education.

With the 1990s came increasing demands that public institutions be more accountable. These demands were due, in part, to increasing taxes, growing deficits, and a perception that public institutions were not providing a level of service commensurate with increased funding. Public education did not escape public scrutiny.

Responding to demands for public accountability, and to determine what the public wanted from its educational institutions, most provincial governments, including Nova Scotia, conducted extensive consultations.

During extensive consultation in 1994–95, Nova Scotians said the key to excellence in education was for everyone to pull together, strengthening the partnership among parents, teachers and students, and the community at large. They also asked for more clearly defined roles and responsibilities, for increased accountability for results, and for redirections of resources to assist classroom teachers as they work with students.

Reflecting on the consultations conducted in the mid-1990s, the Government of Nova Scotia proceeded to revise the Education Act in 1996. A significant aspect of this revision was a reduction in the number of provincial school boards and the further provision of advisory councils for each school. These school councils were given the responsibility to develop school improvement plans and to prepare annual school reports.

Beginning in 2002, the Department of Education initiated a pilot to explore the potential of school accreditation in Nova Scotia. During the pilot years, 18 schools at various levels of schooling and in diverse geographic locations were involved. Following two years of development with the pilot project schools, the processes—the internal review, school improvement plan, and the external review—were evaluated.

The evaluation indicated that school accreditation, as defined by the model developed for the pilot, should be expanded to include all schools in the province. Following the evaluation, government initiated a five-year implementation, beginning with the 2005–2006 school year, that would see the incremental inclusion of all public schools in the Nova Scotia School Accreditation Program.

"I must admit that I am prejudiced to the whole school concept of a learning community of professionals, rather than a team here and a team there, perhaps working on different aspects of student work. Therefore, I like the idea of small teams all working toward the same overall school goal, for this gives force and significance to the effort and means everyone is heading in the same direction albeit in somewhat different ways dependent upon their teams' students' needs. When the school is consistent across its teams' goals, then there is consistency for students when they move from one grade to the next."

Dr. Shirley Hord

School Improvement

School accreditation is about increasing student success through school improvement. School improvement addresses the quality of our schools and the quality of our schools' programs through the creation and implementation of school improvement plans. School improvement has the goal of creating the right kind of environment for students to learn and achieve. During the processes of developing a school improvement plan, schools conduct internal reviews, identify their strengths and needs, prioritize and set goals, and take appropriate and specific actions.

Measuring growth in relation to set goals is an essential part of school improvement. To this end, schools publish annual reports to celebrate their achievements and to identify their progress in meeting the goals of their school improvement plans. School improvement planning and school annual reporting addresses the public demand for accountability while more importantly creating better schools for our students.

Achieving Accreditation

How is a school accredited in Nova Scotia? Accreditation is achieved when a school has presented convincing evidence (data) indicating significant growth in relation to the SMART* goals identified in its school improvement plan. Accreditation is all about the demonstration of improvement.

*SMART goals are
S—Strategic and specific
M—Measurable
A—Attainable
R—Results-based
T—Time bound

Following an intensive process of data collection, a school produces a draft school improvement plan. The draft plan is reviewed by an external team of educators from outside the school board. The external team assists the school in refining, and finalizing its plan. Once the plan is approved, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and school councils work together to implement the plan and move school improvement forward. The school provides annual reports on the progress of implementing its plan. An accreditation team visits the school in the final year of implementation.

Accreditation provides a means to address both the validity and the implementation of the school's improvement plan. It is a systematic approach by which a school receives an independent judgment, from an accreditation team, on its accomplishments in relation to the SMART goals.

Accreditation is also an important way in which educators respond to the public demand for accountability.

School improvement planning, school annual reports, and school accreditation help to ensure that schools engage in a process of continuous improvement, offer quality programs, and provide for the learning success of all students.

School Accreditation Is

- data-driven school improvement
- consistent with the stated aim of the department and school board to continually improve schools
- built on a self-assessment process that is inclusive (school community)
- a collegial model
- a program that provides public accountability
- a validation of the school's improvement plan
- a way to provide opportunities for professional growth
- a way to strengthen school–community relations
- an impetus for change
- an ongoing program that continues over a regular cycle

School Accreditation Is Not

- a mechanism to assess individual staff performance
- a mechanism to compare schools
- a one-time event
- a school "inspection"

School as a Learning Organization

Over the last several years there has been a restating of the purpose of schooling as a learning organization. In the past, curriculum development focussed on what was taught rather than on what was learned. Teachers imparted knowledge to their students. Curriculum objectives were written from the teachers', rather than the students', perspective.

Today curriculum development focuses on what students are required to know and be able to do. Curriculum is articulated as student-centred outcomes. Students are identified as the primary learners in school, but there are other learners too.

In the enterprise of schooling the adults associated with the school are learners. For example, to ensure that students learn, teachers continue to improve their understanding of their craft. They do this by taking advantage of opportunities to learn from others—inside and outside of the school. Learning from their school colleagues has proven more effective and sustainable than learning from occasional encounters with outside professionals. As with student learning, teacher learning is continuous rather than episodic.

To facilitate learning within the school setting, some schools have established professional learning communities. In such communities, teachers with common interests and/or assignments support each other, learning through a culture of collaboration and a focus on results that leads to student success.

"In our view, a learning school is not so much a separate place as a meeting ground for learning—dedicated to the idea that all those involved with it, individually and together, will be continually enhancing and expanding their awareness and capabilities." (Senge 2000, pp. 6 and 19.)

Conditions for Successful School Improvement

School improvement initiatives have taken many forms. There are different models and approaches to improving schools, each with its own unique mixture of principles, processes, and activities. Yet all these share one thing in common: a desire to create the right conditions for successful school improvement. Research has identified the conditions that schools need to address to ensure the desired results of their school improvement plans.

The conditions for successful school improvement are a focus on student learning; long-term commitment of time and resources; comprehensive and co-ordinated staff development; a planning process for continuous improvement; leadership commitment; inquiry, reflection, and evaluation; research-based best practices; networking; broad involvement and shared decision making; and building capacity for managing change.

Focus on Student Learning

The primary purpose of school improvement is to increase the quality of learning opportunities provided for students and to improve student achievement. Goals for school improvement need to focus on student growth, curriculum issues, teaching practices, and methods of student assessment. In order to work successfully with students, teachers need to understand current learning theory and student developmental stages and to connect this knowledge with effective teaching practices.

In order to maintain students at the centre, schools must continuously search for effective ways to engage all students in their own learning. Students need to be active participants in their education. There needs to be a school-wide focus on student learning. Isolated interventions without the belief that students are partners in the school improvement process will not change the fundamental nature of schools.

Long-Term Commitment of Time and Resources

School improvement is not a "quick fix" or a short-term intervention strategy. It requires a long-term commitment and sustained allocations of time and resources. Over a period of years, each school will review all aspects of the school: expectations for students, all curricular programs, instructional practices, student assessment methods, administrative policies and procedures, parent and community involvement, as well as school organization and structures. School improvement is a long-term commitment to continuous improvement. While schools can start at any time, the process never ends.

School-based change takes time, energy, and resources. It requires commitment at both the school level and the board level. Schools require board level support in the form of professional development, material resources, special budget considerations, increased autonomy for decision making, and ongoing recognition. They need to build learning time for teachers into the regular school schedules. School improvement cannot be successfully done as an "add-on." It needs to be a valued and integral part of the school's learning culture.

Comprehensive and Co-ordinated Staff Development

Engaging in school improvement is an ongoing learning process for educators and their communities. It requires that school staffs learn about planning processes, change research and strategies, and best practices in teaching and learning. Staff development activities need to be comprehensive, co-ordinated, and organized around school-based goals and priorities. Staff development activities also need to focus on both the classroom level and the school level.

Staff development strategies such as mentoring, study groups, classroom visits, coaching, curriculum mapping groups, and common assessment teams have proven to be highly successful in supporting teachers to advance their learning. School improvement efforts need to be directly related to student learning and staff development activities and, in turn, need to be directly related to school improvement goals.

School staffs need time to work together, to learn together, and to reach agreements on student expectations and the best practices and programs to implement in order to help students learn. School staffs need a number of days every year for school-wide planning, school-based workshops and institutes, and time for individual and collaborative learning.

School staffs also require access to outside learning opportunities such as conferences, summer institutes, and school visits. Staff members need to go in teams, on behalf of the school, to gain knowledge and learn skills related to their school improvement goals.

Planning Process for Continuous Improvement

Most models of school improvement suggest some form of cyclical planning process that engages educators in continuous improvement. The planning cycle usually has four fundamental elements: assessing or reviewing the school, setting future directions, implementing innovations or changes, and evaluating results.

School assessment involves collecting information from teachers, parents, students, and other sources on the performance of the school and student achievement. Setting future directions typically involves establishing school goals and developing a common purpose and vision. Implementing innovations follows the development of concrete action plans that map the change strategies. Monitoring and evaluation involve measuring the results of the school improvement activities and the impact of these change initiatives on students, teachers, and school organizations. Then the cycle begins again.

There needs to be coherence and an overall theme or direction to the improvement process in the school. Initiatives and activities need to be integrated and co-ordinated, rather than a series of isolated projects. Interconnections and linkages between projects and activities need to be visible. All activities need to be directly related to the long-term vision for the school.

Leadership Commitment

Schools improve when there are multiple forms of leadership, from a variety of people who are working in collaboration on common goals. Layers of shared leadership seem to be necessary to ensure that innovations are implemented and that the school is steadily and systematically making positive changes.

As part of the redesign of the school, the roles and responsibilities of both teachers and administrators are redefined. Different forms of teacher leadership need to be promoted and recognized. There is a breadth and depth of expertise and experience in the school that can assist with change efforts. Teachers must become involved in all aspects of school improvement: co-ordinating activities, participating on curriculum planning teams, leading school-based workshops, collecting and analysing data about the school, organizing staff development sessions, and assisting with monitoring and evaluation.

Principals and vice-principals need to be facilitative leaders who promote and encourage teacher leadership. They must provide both emotional and resource support for change and improvement in the school. Administrators also need to provide pressure for change through articulating clear expectations and building-in direct accountability. They should work as partners with teachers, parents, and students and be open to suggestions and ideas for change.

For school improvement to be successful, there must be a commitment to continuous improvement and shared decision making, at both the board and the school levels. Support in the form of resources, time, and external assistance from the superintendent and the school board is critical. In addition, a major responsibility of the school board is to ensure leadership development.

Inquiry—Reflection—Evaluation

An important component of school improvement is inquiry, reflection, and evaluation. Inquiry and reflection mean that teachers and administrators need to study the impact of their change strategies and processes as they implement innovations. Schools collect school-based data of various kinds to inform decision making. They need time to reflect on their practices along the way and to make adjustments and modifications to those practices.

Evaluation is an integral part of the school improvement process. Once goals are established, indicators of success must be identified, and an evaluation plan developed. Schools need to track their results and the impact of improvement strategies on student learning, teaching practices, and school organization and culture. The evaluation plan needs to identify what information must be collected, from whom it will be collected, and how it will be organized, reported, and used.

Research-Based Best Practices

Educators involved in school improvement will need to learn about best practices in teaching and learning. They must also reach agreements on what changes or innovations they will implement. In order to make informed decisions, schools need to consider what is known to be best practice in any area they choose to focus on. If people are going to spend time, energy, and resources on implementing changes that they expect will make a difference, they need to examine the evidence supporting the innovations.

Schools need to form partnerships with universities and research institutes that can provide them with relevant information and "lessons learned" about different innovations. When staffs identify instructional goals, they usually need resource people who bring specific knowledge and skills to help translate these innovations into practice. They also need to draw on the experience and expertise of other schools that have implemented specific strategies or programs.

Networking

Networking is a powerful strategy that brings school practitioners together to learn from each other and to share ideas. Electronic and face-to-face networking provides a vehicle for people to share their accomplishments and to learn about successful classroom innovations and effective change strategies. It also creates an opportunity to problem solve when schools encounter obstacles and challenges. Practitioners in schools can provide one another with practical and valuable suggestions about what works and what does not. Networking can provide both pressure and support for schools involved in school improvement.

At times, staff involved in school improvement will require outside facilitators or resource people to guide them in their change activities. Facilitators are required at different points in the planning process. They are also helpful as trouble shooters, problem solvers, and mediators once implementation starts. Schools often require assistance with monitoring and evaluation of school improvement, as well.

Connecting to the world outside the school is essential for success in school improvement. School practitioners need to network with other schools, form partnerships, and locate outside expertise and assistance when this expertise is not available in the school.

Broad Involvement and Shared Decision Making

If schools are to make changes, there must be a critical mass of partners involved in improvement efforts. The opportunity to participate in different ways needs to be encouraged, so that individualism remains valued. Students, parents, and community members need to be part of the process. Rather than being recipients of innovations, they need to be associates in planning, implementing, and evaluating. This builds commitment from the outset and ensures a level of tolerance and support when conflict or roadblocks are encountered. School improvement is about establishing vital partnerships that can support positive change. School councils serve as a mechanism to strengthen broad involvement and shared decision making.

People affected by decisions need to be legitimately involved in the decision-making process. In order to build commitment for change and to have people assume responsibility for accomplishing school improvement goals, the people who are expected to implement the changes need to have a say about policies, procedures, practices, and programs. Decisions about teaching and learning need to be made at the level of action and implementation. In order for school improvement to be successful, all teachers should have input into decisions that affect their work lives.

Building Capacity for Managing Change

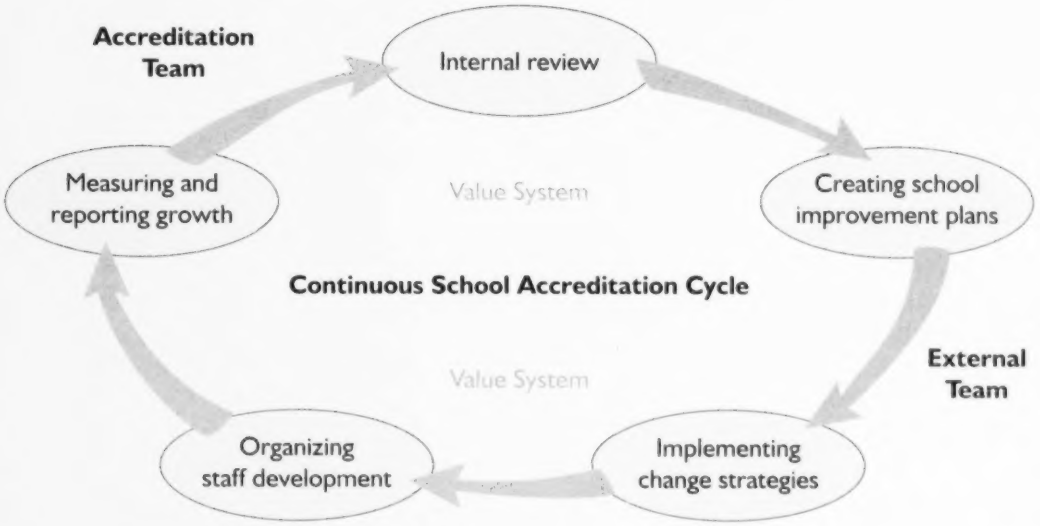
Developing skills and strategies for managing change is a major goal for schools choosing to engage in school improvement and reform. Learning about the change process and change research provides education partners with both knowledge for reflection and tools for engaging with colleagues in decision making and planning.

One of the pillars of school improvement is teamwork. School improvement is a very complex process that involves finding problems, solving problems, and making critical decisions about school policies, procedures, practices, and programs. This requires that people learn how to work together more effectively and assume collective responsibility for the school. They must have knowledge, skills, and strategies for effective group dynamics and organizational development.

Managing conflict and power is perhaps one of the most important skills to be learned. Developing ways to resolve differences and to use conflict in productive ways is a continuing challenge. Education partners also need to learn about shared decision making and problem-solving strategies, action planning, running effective meetings, communication and relationship skills, vision building and culture, and action research and other evaluation processes.

Those involved in school improvement planning need to develop a mind-set for change and engage in risk taking and experimentation, reflection and action, problem solving and collaboration. Practitioners also need to develop their abilities in understanding and using contextual factors to support change. They need to understand the board's priorities and culture, the community they serve, as well as provincial initiatives and directions. Educators must learn how to practise positive politics for gaining support and recognition.

Nova Scotia Continuous School Accreditation Cycle



School accreditation comprises key components that are part of a cycle of continuous improvement. These components include an internal review, a school improvement plan, an external review, the implementation of strategies, a staff development plan, measuring growth and annual reporting, and an accreditation review.

Year One

- begin cycle
- conduct the internal review
- develop the school improvement plan
- conduct the external review; receive approval from the Department of Education

Years Two, Three, and Four

- implement the school improvement plan
- carry out ongoing data collection and analysis
- measure growth and annual reporting
- adapt the school improvement plan

Year Five

- accreditation team visit
- prepare for the next cycle

School Accreditation Year One Timeline

April–May (before the cycle begins)

- An orientation session is held for schools.
- School accreditation surveys are administered.
- Internal review team members are selected by the school.

September

- Internal review team workshop is held (with Department of Education).
- Survey data results are returned to schools.
- School-based accreditation day for the internal review.
- School receives funding for the internal review.

October–November

- School continues with the internal review process.
- Data collection to address the accreditation questions continues.
- External review team members are selected.
- Dates are selected for external review team visit.

December

- Draft of internal review report completed.

January

- School improvement planning workshop.
- School builds a plan based on the internal review conclusions and agreed priorities.

February

- School continues with the improvement planning process.

March

- Draft of school improvement plan completed and shared with staff and school advisory council (SAC).
- Draft submitted to Board Accreditation Co-ordinator for review.

April–May

- External review team visits school.
- School receives funding to implement plan.

Accreditation Roles

The Nova Scotia School Accreditation Program is inclusive. All within the school community have a part to play in the success of a school's internal review and school improvement plan. Collaboration is critical, as is involvement.

While all within the school community are involved, there are certain specific roles that facilitate the process.

Role of the Principal

- Conduct presentations for the school staff, the SAC, and the community on the accreditation program.
- Maintain open communication with the school community about school improvement activities and results achieved in the accreditation program.
- Serve on the internal review team.
- Attend all accreditation related professional development.
- Participate in ongoing planning and organization meetings with co-chairs of the internal review team.
- Collaborate with members of the internal review team, Department of Education officials, and board personnel in the development of data collection methods.
- Participate in the data analysis phase, by studying the data and helping the school community reach accurate conclusions.
- Co-facilitate planning sessions focussed on developing the school improvement plan.
- Assist in the development of a measuring and reporting growth process designed to systematically collect data over the three-year implementation stage.
- Meet with the external review and accreditation teams to provide relevant background information about the internal review, the school improvement plan, and the implementation of improvement strategies.
- Participate in writing the school improvement plan.
- Serve on external review teams.
- Organize a September to June schedule of events for year one of the accreditation process.
- Supervise the implementation of the school improvement plan.
- Submit annual reports to school board.

Role of the Internal Review Team

- Lead internal review process (primary responsibility).
- Provide timely and relevant information about school accreditation to all partners of the school community.
- Meet periodically to monitor progress and give input into the accreditation program.
- Participate in school improvement planning and data analysis sessions.
- Review and edit any written information about school accreditation before it is circulated to the school community and/or the Department of Education.
- Sign off on the internal review report when the team is satisfied with the accuracy of the content.
- Participate in the school's external review program.
- Upon request, meet with board and Department of Education personnel responsible for school accreditation.

Role of the Internal Review Team Co-chairs

- Attend school accreditation professional development sessions provided by the Department of Education and the school boards.
- Conduct information and orientation sessions with school staff.
- Develop agendas and chair meetings of the internal review team.
- Participate in ongoing planning and organization meetings with the principal and regional personnel.
- Meet on a regular basis with the regional level co-ordinator/consultant responsible for school accreditation.
- Lead school staff through information gathering sessions that identify learning opportunities provided for students.
- Collaborate with internal review team members and external resource people to develop well-designed data collection methods.
- Serve as the lead writer for the internal review report.
- Lead the staff and the internal review team in data analysis.
- Conduct presentations about school accreditation for parents, students, community members and the school advisory council.
- Organize and facilitate school improvement planning sessions.
- Develop the first draft of the school improvement plan following school planning sessions.
- Serve as a liaison between the staff and the internal review team. Keep both groups informed and involved in the decision-making process.
- Write the final copy of the school improvement plan in co-operation with the staff, the internal review team, and the principal.
- Meet with members of the external review and school accreditation teams to provide relevant background information and personal perceptions about the process.
- Serve on external review teams that visit other schools.
- Collaborate with the principal and the board co-ordinator to develop a plan for measuring and reporting growth.

Role of the School Advisory Council

The school advisory council or its representative member(s) will serve as the internal review team, or appoint one or two of its members to serve on the internal review team.

The school advisory council will participate in the Nova Scotia School Accreditation Program in the following ways:

- Provide input into the development of data collection methods.
- Provide input through focus groups and surveys.
- Participate in planning sessions, where feasible.
- Provide input into the analysis of data collected during the internal review.
- Request regular updates from the principal and co-chairs on the internal review and school improvement planning process.
- Communicate on a regular basis with parents, students, staff, and the community about the accreditation program.
- Meet with the external review team in order to provide its perceptions and relevant background information.
- Receive and respond to regular updates from the principal regarding the internal review, implementation of the school improvement plan, and the progress being made towards achieving the goals.
- Ensure that the school's annual report contains information on progress made in relation to the school improvement plan's goals.
- Meet with the accreditation team to provide its perceptions and relevant background information.

Role of the External Review Team Chair

- Communicate with the principal and the co-chairs of the internal review team prior to the external team's visit.
- Receive copies of the internal review report and school improvement plan from the board co-ordinator. Provide copies to external team members at least two weeks prior to the school visit.
- Communicate with external team members that they are expected to analyse the school's internal review report and the school improvement plan prior to the school visit.
- In collaboration with the principal, organize a schedule of events prior to the school visit.
- Contact, as appropriate, Department of Education or board personnel to resolve any issues that may arise.
- If the external review team cannot reach a consensus agreement during their discussions, the chair is responsible to make the final decision.
- Serve as the primary writer on the external review team. This will mean delegating writing tasks, early in the process, and co-ordinating team discussions intended to clarify the content of the report.
- Co-ordinate logistic arrangements for the external team. This means co-ordinating hotel and travel arrangements, finding meeting spaces and technology support, and clarifying financial expectations.

- Follow-up with the principal and the co-chairs to ensure that recommendations from the external team have been included in the internal review report or school improvement plan.
- Provide teachers, support staff, and the school advisory council with copies of the external review team report.
- Distribute copies of the final external review report to designated officials at the Department of Education and at the regional school board level.

Role of the External Review Team

- Validate the school's internal review by meeting with students, parents, teachers, and support staff to ensure that the process has been open and inclusive of varied stakeholders.
- Conduct individual interviews with school administrators, key stakeholders, and the co-chairs of the internal review team to establish their views of the process and the content of the internal report and the school improvement plan.
- Study the school's internal review report to ensure that the information is complete and to validate that the data analysis is accurate.
- Study the school's improvement plan to confirm that the plan has been completed and the goals are aligned with evidence from the internal review process.
- Co-ordinate classroom visits to observe if students are engaged in activities as reported in the "Opportunities" section of the internal review report.
- Meet with the school advisory council, internal review team, and student representatives to discuss the accreditation program.
- Prepare an external review report that highlights the major findings of the external review.

Role of the School Board

- Provide support by allocating financial and human resources.
- Support schools within the board in their use of site-based and other days to engage in the accreditation program.
- Review financial statements to ensure that funds were spent appropriately.
- Identify board personnel to co-ordinate and support the accreditation program.
- Support board personnel to network with other board accreditation co-ordinators and the Department of Education.
- Permit schools to focus on accreditation as a priority.

Role of the Department of Education

- Support a provincial school accreditation lead team.
- Lead and support a network of board accreditation co-ordinators.
- Provide data collection services related to school performance.
- Provide schools with flexibility in their use of site-based PD days.
- Provide information to schools and parents.
- Create and maintain a school accreditation website.
- Arrange and support external review teams and accreditation teams.
- Provide supporting documents.
- Provide leadership, support, and professional development.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the overall plan for school accreditation?

Participating schools are engaged in an ongoing and cyclical program. Each cycle is five years as described below:

Year One:

- School undertakes an internal review to address specific questions about its performance as a learning community and the academic achievement of its students.
- School collects and analyses data addressing specific questions.
- School determines strengths and areas needing improvement.
- School sets priorities based on areas needing improvement.
- School develops and drafts a four-year school improvement plan.
- External review team visits school to validate plan.

Years Two, Three, and Four:

- School implements its plan, continuously evaluates the plan's effectiveness in addressing the school's improvement priorities, revises strategies as necessary, and reports annually.

Year Five:

- Accreditation team visits school to validate the success of the school improvement plan in achieving its goals and makes a recommendation on accreditation.
- School prepares for next cycle.

What is the plan to involve Nova Scotia schools?

It will take five years before all schools in the province are involved in the School Accreditation process. The process began in 2005 with 49 schools participating.

Who selects the schools? Are there any specific criteria?

The department will allocate to each school board a specific number of its schools that will participate. Each board will select its participating schools based on the department's allocation and the size of a school's student population.

What financial support is given to schools?

Each school will be given a grant of $2000 to support the internal review process. Upon approval of the school improvement plan by the external review team, the department will give an implementation grant to the school ($3000 plus $5/student).

What other support is given to schools?

The department will be providing assistance throughout each cycle. The department will give workshops for school teams at key stages in the process. The department will support schools in their collection of data. Assessment results will be provided, where available, to supplement the results from classroom assessments. The department will provide

surveys to each school for the purpose of probing the opinions of students, teachers, parents, and support staff on specific performance themes. The department will provide a service to capture the survey data and analyse the results. School boards will also support their schools as they engage in the process of developing and implementing a school improvement plan.

Who is involved in the process at the school level?

The success of a school improvement planning process is founded on the principle of inclusiveness. The whole school community—teachers, students, support staff, school advisory councils, and the school's administration—must be involved in all aspects of the development of the plan and its implementation. The school improvement plan is the school's plan.

How will a school receive accreditation?

Accreditation is directly linked to the school's improvement plan and the achievement of the goals set out in its plan. A school will be accredited when it has presented convincing evidence (data) that indicates that significant growth has been achieved in relation to each of the SMART goals from its school improvement plan. Accreditation is about demonstrating improvement.

In year five of the cycle an accreditation team will visit the school for the purpose of examining the evidence presented by the school. The accreditation team will

- review the school improvement plan and the three annual reports
- review data and other evidence provided by the school
- recommend accreditation or further work by the school

The accreditation team will ask the following questions:

- Did the school implement the strategies as indicated in the school improvement plan and annual updates?
- Did the school collect data according to its plan?
- Did the data as evidence presented demonstrate growth towards the achievement of the goals?
- Did the school use its implementation money to support its school improvement plan strategies?

When would a school not be recommended for accreditation?

A school would not be recommended for accreditation if

- it did not present data as evidence
- it did not submit annual reports
- it did not achieve growth in relation to its goals

Where can I get more information?

Information for participating schools is available on the Nova Scotia School Accreditation Program website, <accreditation.EDnet.ns.ca> (user name and password required).

Professional Resources

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Speck, Marsha and Phyllis H. Lindstrom. *The Principal as Professional Development Leader: Building Capacity for Improving Student Achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2004.

Tucker, Pamela and James H. Stronge. *Linking Teacher Evaluation and Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005.

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